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ABSTRACT

An investigation of the School Psychology Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) was designed to identify the components of effective supervision in the clinical setting. A survey was conducted of students' (school psychologist trainees) and their supervisors' perceptions of the amount of time spent during supervision in various activities and of activities that were the most or the least beneficial. Across the three years of training, there was consistent agreement among students and supervisors that the bulk of supervisory time was and should be devoted to technical issues, somewhat less time should be spent with personal-affective concerns, and the least time with other activities, including administration. Students and supervisors also agreed that important trainee behavior included ability to make presentations clearly, assertiveness, consideration of feedback, and preparation. These findings accurately reflected the existing structure of training at UNC-CH and suggested that there are ways of viewing supervision which are held in common with other disciplines. (Authors/JD)

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An Activity Analysis of Supervision During Training in School Psychology

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SP 018 593

Abstract

A survey was conducted of students' and supervisors' perceptions of the amount of time spent during supervision in various activities, and which activities were the most and least beneficial. Across the three years of training there was consistent agreement among students and supervisors that the bulk of supervisory time was and should be devoted to technical issues, somewhat less to personal-affective concerns, and the least time to other activities including administration. These findings relate directly to the existing structure of training and suggest that there are ways of viewing supervision which are held in common with other disciplines.

An Activity Analysis of Supervision During Training in School Psychology

At the present time, there is essentially no professional literature on the topic of supervision specific to school psychology, but, there are substantial writings in the fields of business, education and related helping professions: clinical psychology, social work and counseling (Berman, 1971; Galassi, Westefeld & Lawler, in press; Hess, 1980; Kadushin, 1976, and Wolberg, 1954). The paucity of work in school psychology may be due, in part, to the recency with which this specialty has declared itself (the largest professional group, the National Association of School Psychologists, was organized 11 years ago). First generation school psychologists emerged from the ranks of clinical psychologists, applying clinical models to the practice of psychology in the schools. It is time now to consider whether school psychology differs, in its body of knowledge and practice, from clinical or counseling psychology, to a degree that warrants new and different models of supervision, i.e., do the existing models in other disciplines serve the specialized needs of school psychology? To address this question, popular models were sought in the literature from related professional services areas.

In clinical practice; Hess (1980) has delineated six models of supervision that have evolved for the supervision of psychotherapy: Lecturer, Teacher, Case review, Collegial-Peer, Therapist and Monitor (p. 17). He discusses their distinguishing characteristics and offers the models with attendant functions, advantages and liabilities as a guide for considering how to structure supervisory relationships. Each of Hess' models (or roles) seems applicable to the practice of school psychology and is readily recognizable in supervisory behavior in the discipline.

Kadushin (1976), writing on social work, presents an integrated concept of supervision which brings together broad aspects of the process. He first points out traditional connotations of the dictionary definition of supervision deriving from super - "over" and videre - "to watch or see", which stresses the administrative aspect of supervision, i.e., ". . . the concern with seeing that a job is performed at a qualitatively and quantitatively acceptable level" (p. 19). Along with the administrative aspect, Kadushin sees two more functions of supervision: the educative function ". . . a method of transmitting knowledge and skills in practice from the trained to the untrained, from the experienced to inexperienced student and worker", and, the expressive-supportive function to sustain morale, help with job related discouragements and to give the supervisee ". . . a sense of worth as a professional . . . and a sense of security in their performance" (p. 20). In reviewing the research on effective supervision, Kadushin (1976) found two kinds of factors. There are the "task centered", instrumental considerations of supervision which relate to getting the job done by seeing that the supervisee is provided with resources and skills needed to do the job, and the "people centered", expressive-supportive considerations of supervision which are concerned with seeing that the supervisees are ", . . comfortable, satisfied, happy in their work and have a sense of psychological well-being" (p. 1981). The expressive-supportive functions keep the supervision system running smoothly and are necessary for the achievement of instrumental goals.

Hess' (1980) and Kadushin's (1976) formulations are clearly complimentary. Each of Hess' roles can be thought of in Kadushin's terms, e.g., "lecturer" would be more educative than expressive-supportive with little of the administrative component. Also, the "monitor" role addresses the administrative component described by Kadushin, while the "collegial-peer" and "therapist" roles are mostly concerned with the expressive-supportive aspect of supervision.

For the present study, the dimensions and roles of supervision, already mentioned, were reformulated as technical and personal affective variables which, in the view of the present authors, better relate these terms to the training context of school psychology. Technical, for example, includes the requisite conveyance of skills to the trainee, which may transcend the immediate task of diagnosing a child's problems. School psychologists have many technical functions to carry out requiring skills in assessment program planning, implementation and evaluation, focusing on individuals, groups and systems as targets. In those activities there are also, many interpersonal variables operating at individual group and systems levels (Burke, Haworth & Brantley, 1980). The interpersonal style, enthusiasm, confidence, and morale of client, trainee and supervisor form a three-way interaction, the personal-affective dimension, which includes Kadushin's expressive-supportive function.

The present investigation was a part of the programmatic self-study of training effectiveness of the School Psychology Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which was designed to identify the experiential components of supervision from the perspective of students in training and their supervisors. For this purpose, a survey questionnaire was developed to assess the "technical" and "personal-affective" dimensions of supervision, as well as specific behaviors which the supervisors and trainees considered important or detrimental to supervision. The questionnaire called for "actual" and "ideal" student and supervisor perceptions of supervision, in both structured and open format.

Method

Participants

Seven practicum supervisors and twenty three trainees representing the first, second and third years of training in school psychology at UNC-CH, were asked to respond to the survey. Five supervisors responded (3/3 university based; 2/4 field based) for a 71% return. Nineteen students provided an 83% return, with 7/8 of first year, 7/10 of second year and 5/5 of the third year students responding. The UNC-CH training model has been described elsewhere in the literature (Burke, Haworth and Brantley, 1980 ; Haworth & Brantley, 1981). Students in training spend 1 day per week in schools their first year and two days per week each succeeding year, under program supervision, in rural and suburban public school systems. Students are exposed to a full spectrum of demands for assessment, intervention and consultation services on their placements.

Survey Instrument[1]

Students and supervisors were asked to base their responses on their supervision experiences during the current year. The questionnaire was administered near the end of the fall school semester.

Part I of the two page survey called for the apportionment of supervision into the percentage of time devoted to each area of supervision; technical, personal-affective, and other, first from the actual perspective (how it is now), then, the ideal perspective (how they would like it to be). In the Survey, technical supervision was defined as focusing on technical skills such as assessment, report writing, and program planning conveyed in a didactic manner such as, "This is how you do it." Personal-affective supervision was defined as focusing on intra- and interpersonal experience and feelings. Respondents

were asked to write in pertinent aspects for the "Other" category. The students responded only for their current year level; supervisors responded for each of the three years of the program in which they were supervising students.

Part II required that students and supervisors designate behaviors of high importance to their supervision. Behaviors were designated on the basis of "actual" supervision, and, according to how supervision should "ideally" be. Respondees were also asked to note supervisor and trainee behaviors which had been detrimental to their supervision this year. A list of potentially detrimental behaviors compiled by faculty and students was provided for Part II and respondees were encouraged to add others. A final question was designed to elicit opinions (actual and ideal) about who controlled the topic of supervision.

Respondents defined the "Other" category to include: collaborative or mutual problem solving (cited most often), discussion of ethical and role model issues, determining use of practicum time, and supervisors' experiences offered for the benefit of information or understanding.

Results

From the data, comparisons were drawn between "actual" and "ideal" experiences of trainees and supervisors, and between types of supervision, across training year levels in the program (1st, 2nd, or 3rd).

In Figure 1, mean percentages of time devoted to the types of supervision (technical, personal-affective, and other) are given across training year levels from the perspective of students and supervisors.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

Actual and Ideal Perceptions of Students and Supervisors

At the first year level, perceptions of students and supervisors of actual and ideal apportionment of time among the three types of supervision were almost identical. As Figure 1 illustrates, about 50% of time was spent in technical supervision, about 30% in personal-affective and the remaining 15-20% in other pursuits. In the second year, some divergence of opinion emerged. Students described their actual experiences as a 70:20:10 percent (technical, personal-affective and other) ratio, preferring instead a 50:30:20 percent distribution. The ratings of second year supervisors agreed closely with students: The third year, student perceptions of actual and ideal experiences were in close agreement, following the trends of years 1 and 2 with ratios of approximately 50:40:10 percent. Supervisors responded somewhat differently. Their actual experiences were a 40:20:40 division of time compared to their preference for a 40:30:30 ratio.

Discussion

Findings of the present study are descriptive for the one program of training from which they are drawn, even though a limited quantity of data are involved. The results convey a remarkable sense of agreement and consistency between students' and supervisors' perceptions of how time is spent in school psychology supervision when that time is divided into the three categories of technical, personal-affective and other activity. Regardless of year of training, technical concerns predominate. This finding accurately reflects the primary emphasis in training at UNC-CH on the knowledge base and skills involved in psychoeducational assessment and behavioral intervention which comprise 35% of the common core training of specialist and doctoral students (Haworth and Brantley, 1981). The higher ratings of actual technical supervision in year two also accurately correspond to the first primary

responsibility for psychological service delivery by advanced students, following their initial apprenticeship year. This increased commitment to technical supervision takes place at the expense of personal-affective time, which declines from 30 to 20%. To the extent that assessment and intervention comprise the major areas of school psychology's knowledge base, as training standards say they do (APA Criteria for Accreditation of Doctoral Training Programs and Internships in Professional Psychology, 1979; NASP Standards for Accreditation in School Psychology, 1978)[2], then it could be expected that the largest share of supervision time would be devoted to the practical application and refinement of these skills.

At the third year level, students report that technical supervision returns to a 50% level while personal-affective time rises to the highest level of the three years at 40%, and other activities remain around 10%. These changes appear to be consonant with: a sense of attained technical mastery, increased demands for therapeutic intervention, consultation and system-level service, third year practica in system-level settings, and a corresponding conceptual shift in program emphasis to system-level training (with advanced courses in consultation, evaluation and professional development). As students complete the third and last year of preparation, students and supervisors report an emerging colleagiality which promotes consideration of personal-affective variables. The third year is the only one in which there is appreciable difference between supervisors' and students' perceptions. Supervisors' comments on the third year category of "Other" activity suggest that mutual problem solving becomes a significant component of supervision at this time, reinforcing a shared sense of colleagiality between supervisor and student. Discussion of ethical issues extends the professional development component of training into field practice applications, and the determination of supervisory time use is

an example of the administrative component of the "Other" category of supervisory activity.

Part II of the questionnaire asked that students and supervisors designate supervisor behaviors which they felt were important to supervision. Generally speaking, all students and supervisors concurred that "exploring feelings, empathizing, supporting, instilling confidence and being open to other's viewpoints" were highly important. "Admitting fallability" was of medium to high importance and "confronting" was of medium to low importance. Also mentioned, by some as important, was the supervisor's ". . . ability to view problem situations in both a serious and humorous light which helps to ease the tension, in some school situations." Detrimental supervisor behaviors noted most often were: "nondirective" by first year students, "ambiguous" by second year students, and "not enough positive feedback" by third year students. Other detrimental behaviors or factors added by students were "interruptions," "telling war stories," "engaging in other activities," "forces things on you," "not enough focus on current problems," and "not enough time." Supervisors rated their own "poor organization" as most detrimental.

Trainee behaviors that were rated as of importance by students and supervisors were "presents clearly, assertive, considers feedback, and prepared." Other important behaviors noted by supervisors were "focused, ability to present new ideas, and requests feedback and assistance at appropriate times." Trainee behaviors that were noted most often by students as detrimental to supervision were "poor organization and overly dependent" while supervisors specified "inability to prioritize tasks and not trusting their own ability." Students seemed more critical of their own behavior than supervisors were.

Another issue the questionnaire probed was the proportion of topics in supervision which were controlled by the trainee. Both students and supervisors

considered the control of topics in supervision to be more in the hands of the trainee than supervisor. Students saw themselves in control about 70 to 80% of the time compared to supervisors who saw topic selection controlled by the trainee about 60% of the time. Second and third year students sought a greater proportion of control (about 80% as ideal) than first year students (60% ideal).

A recent survey in a nearby clinical psychology program (Lowman, Note 1) yielded many similar findings, for example that students felt that beginning students needed relatively more focus on client-related task variables than advanced students who could better use a process emphasis. While there was some diversity of opinion, the supervisors and students in the clinical psychology program felt generally that both technical and process concerns were important. Characteristics of clinical student's best supervisor or supervision were: (a) competence--the supervisors had a great deal of knowledge about people, psychopathology, and professional skills; (b) supervisors had a strong willingness to share their knowledge with students; (c) in supervision sessions, supervisors were described as communicating a great deal of warmth and support, as giving a great deal of honest feedback, and as engaging in mutual problem solving. Several students felt a great deal of focus on process aspects of the supervisory relationship was also characteristic of the best supervisors. In sum, the students reported their favored supervision as being a place where sufficient technical expertise was available and skillfully shared, such that students were open to learning and less afraid to show ignorance or to make mistakes. Both school and clinical psychology students concurred that a characteristic of their worst supervisory experience was extreme nondirectiveness.

Regarding the conceptual alternatives of Hess (1980) and Kadushin (1976) already put forward, it can be said that supervision in school psychology may

be viewed, categorized and to a large extent understood in terms similar to those used in other fields, such as clinical psychology and social work. Although it may be too early to say whether a unique model of supervision is warranted for school psychology, there are some components such as "collaborative or mutual problem solving," not accounted for in these terms, which deserve further exploration.

Reference Notes

1. Personal communication from Joe Lowman, Dept. of Psychology, UNC-CH, May, 1979.

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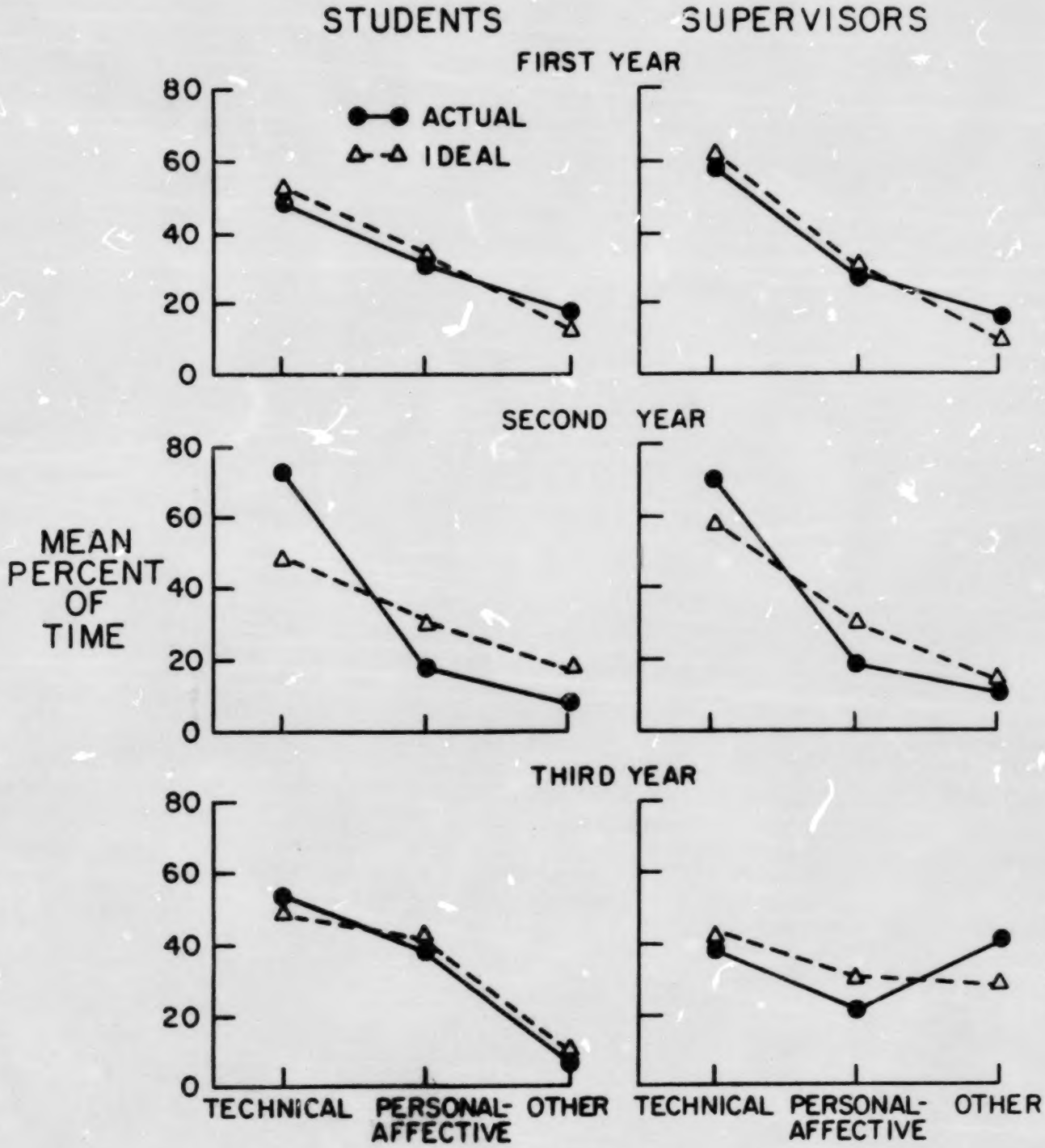
Footnotes

[1]Copies of the survey may be obtained from the second author, % School of Education, UNC-CH, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514.

[2]The UNC-CH Program is both APA and NCATE accredited.

Figure Captions

1. Actual and ideal experiences of school psychology students and their supervisors by type of supervisory activity and year level in training.


STUDENTS
SUPERVISORS
FIRST YEAR
ACTUAL
IDEAL
SECOND YEAR
THIRD YEAR
MEAN PERCENT OF TIME
80
60
40
20
0
TECHNICAL
PERSONAL-AFFECTIVE
OTHER